

3. The Sufferings of the Gospel Worker

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[0 : 00] Well now we come to our reading from the scriptures. And can we turn together to Paul's second letter to Timothy? And you'll find this on page 995 in our hardback Bibles.

To Timothy, and I'm reading from chapter 2, the first 13 verses. And if you've been here the last week or two, you'll remember that we've been looking at the first chapter.

And Paul has been encouraging, commanding Timothy to be strong, to be prepared to suffer in chapter 1, verse 8 for the gospel. And he goes on to develop that theme here in the second chapter.

So 2 Timothy, chapter 2, verse 1. You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

[1 : 12] No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.

It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. Think over what I say. For the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal.

But the word of God is not bound. Therefore, I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

The saying is trustworthy. For if we have died with him, we will also live with him. If we endure, we will also reign with him.

[2 : 13] If we deny him, he also will deny us. If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself.

Amen. This is the very word of God. And may it be a blessing to our hearts this evening. Well, friends, do let's turn to 2 Timothy chapter 2 again on page 995.

I'm very glad to see you all. And I do hope that you're feeling lively and not too warm. It is a very warm day, isn't it? I'm conscious there's a lot of warmth here.

If you should find that you're drowsing as the evening goes on, maybe your neighbor could have mercy upon you. There are two ways of having mercy upon your drowsy neighbor.

The first is just to let him sleep on. But the second way is to have mercy and just prod him gently and say the sermon's nearly over, even if it's not quite.

[3 : 14] So here we go, 2 Timothy chapter 2. Now, I wonder, friends, if you've ever been to a church where everything that goes on is unbelievably wonderful.

Have you been to a church like that? You walk in and everybody is smiling. You sing the hymns and the songs and every one of them is about celebration and joy.

And everybody looks so well. They're all suntanned and smiling. Nobody, as you look around the congregation, not one is miserable. Not one is depressed.

Even the children look perfectly behaved. You wonder, perhaps, if somebody has dropped something into their iron brew. Now, there are churches that convey that impression that everything is perfect and wonderful.

And you have to wonder whether they're living in fantasy land. Certainly, I guess they would struggle with a Bible passage like the one under our noses tonight. Because this passage is about the sufferings of the Christian, the sufferings of the gospel worker.

[4 : 14] And therefore, also the sufferings of the gospel church. And it's those sufferings that we must look at together this evening. Now, before you burst into tears or make a run for the exit, let

me say this.

That although Paul is calling on Timothy to be willing to suffer for the gospel, the whole tone of this passage is wonderfully encouraging. Paul's message is, there is no gain without pain, but there will be gain.

And there's no fruitfulness without toil, but there will be fruitfulness. And there's no glory except through suffering, but there will be glory. Now, that's the encouraging emphasis.

And I want to flag that up first before we get into the details of the text. This is a tough message, and we need to hear it. But if we hear the tone in which Paul is really writing to Timothy, I think we'll be genuinely given fresh heart to carry on, not simply as Christians, but Christians who are actively engaged in gospel service.

Now, let's remind ourselves of the historical situation here. The year is something like 64 AD. Nero, a vicious and unpredictable man, is on the throne of the Roman Empire.

[5 : 29] And he is ratcheting up his persecution of the church at this stage. And it's because of this persecution that Paul is in prison in Rome. And he knows that he is very soon to be executed.

You remember how he writes in chapter 4, verse 6, the time of my departure has come. So he's writing this letter, his last letter, at least the last to be recorded in the New Testament.

He's writing to his trusted and much-loved fellow worker, Timothy, whom he calls my child in chapter 2, verse 1, and in chapter 1, verse 2, my beloved child.

And in this letter, he's preparing Timothy and bracing Timothy for the tough life of gospel service that lies before him. And the function of this letter today in 2012 will be to brace us and to instruct us in how to live a life of active Christian service.

It's a letter that's going to have a lot to say to pastors and church leaders and future pastors. I hope there might be quite a number of those here this evening about the distinctive role of the pastor.

[6 : 36] But it has a lot to say as well to all of us as we engage in the work of the gospel. All Christians have a part to play in the work of the gospel. Not only the leaders and the teachers, but all of us who work in the Lord's cause and make our particular contribution to it.

Now, as we did last week in chapter 1, I want us to take a moment first to survey the scene and to get an overview of what Paul is saying to Timothy in these first 13 verses of chapter 2.

So perhaps you'd run your eye down the page with me. In verse 1, Paul reminds Timothy that he's weak. That's why Timothy needs to be strengthened. But Paul then shows Timothy in verse 1 a wonderful reservoir of strength which he's able to draw on.

And then verse 2, strengthened by this reservoir of the grace of Christ, Timothy is now to set about the task of passing on the pattern of the sound words, the gospel, to other people who in their turn will be able to teach yet others.

So verse 2 is all about the glorious task of training the right kind of people for gospel ministry. And then the whole of the rest of the passage from verse 3 to verse 13 is about the difficulty, the suffering, the hard work, the effort and concentration and focus that will be required of Timothy and indeed of anyone who is committed to gospel service.

[8 : 04] So Paul gives Timothy in verse 3 the basic command which governs the next 10 verses. Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

Now in fact he has said something very similar back in chapter 1 verse 8. Share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God. But it's here in chapter 2 verses 3 to 13 that Paul develops his theme of suffering for the gospel.

And how does he develop it? By picking five examples. Each of which will shed light on the question of how to endure hardship in gospel service.

The first example is the example of the soldier. He develops that in verse 4. The second is the example of the athlete. in verse 5.

The third is the farmer. In verse 6. The fourth example is that of Jesus himself. In verse 8. And the fifth is that of Paul. In verses 9 and 10.

[9 : 05] And then finally in verses 11 to 13. Paul gives Timothy what he calls a trustworthy saying. And this may be a quotation from a well-known early Christian hymn which Paul and Timothy and their friends might have known and sung together at their gatherings.

And Paul brings it in here to drive home the point about suffering and difficulty which he's been making ever since verse 3. In fact this trustworthy saying quoted here in 11, 12 and 13 could have been as familiar to Paul and Timothy as amazing grace or hark the herald angels sing are to us.

And Paul quotes it here to Timothy to clinch his message. So do you see where Paul is taking Timothy and taking us to? He's showing Timothy first a heavenly resource to draw on in verse 1. Second a strategic task to undertake in verse 2. And third a courageous attitude to cultivate in verses 3 to 13.

So let's take the passage onto those three headings. First a heavenly resource to draw on in verse 1. Let me read the verse again. You then my child be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

[10:25] Now before we look at this resource the grace that is in Christ Jesus can I point out something about the first two words of this verse. You then. Now just bear those two words in mind and have a look back a page to 1 Timothy 1 Timothy chapter 6 and verse 11.

Look at the beginning of the verse. But as for you. Then turn forward to 2 Timothy chapter 3 verse 10.

3.10 You however. Then look at 3.14 But as for you. And then look at chapter 4 verse 5 As for you. Now in all five of those moments Paul is calling on Timothy to be very different. And these five moments in 1 and 2 Timothy tell us a great deal about the whole tone of Paul's way of writing to Timothy in both the letters.

Let me show you from the text. Look back first of all to 1 Timothy chapter 6 and verses 9 and 10. And verses 9 and 10 there Paul is talking about worldly people who are in love with their wealth and their love of money leads them into all kinds of ruin and destruction.

[11:47] But verse 11 As for you by contrast O man of God I charge you to live differently pursue godliness and righteousness and so on. Then look on to 2 Timothy chapter 1 verse 15 chapter 1 verse 15 Everyone you're aware that everyone all who are in Asia turned away from me among whom are Phygelus and Homogenes only Onesiphorus he says was not ashamed of my chains.

Now chapter 2 verse 1 You then Timothy by contrast to these other fair weather Christians live differently. They have been weak deserters but you must be strengthened to live differently.

Do you see the pattern that's emerging here? Look on to chapter 3 verses 1 to 9 Now those first 9 verses of chapter 3 are all about godlessness and particularly about godlessness in the behaviour of people who pretend to be religious but are actually wicked.

Now verse 10 But Timothy you by contrast you have been living differently you've been following my conduct and my example and I'm charging you to carry on living differently.

Look at chapter 3 verse 13 evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse deceiving and being deceived but as for you Timothy by contrast you continue in what you have learned and firmly believed.

[13:15] Then look at chapter 4 verses 3 and 4 which describe people who will not endure sound teaching people who won't tolerate the gospel won't tolerate listening to the truth and will turn away and wander into myths.

And then verse 5 But as for you by contrast always be sober minded endure suffering do the work do the work of an evangelist and fulfil your ministry.

Now isn't it clear how Paul is handling Timothy in these letters and especially this second letter where four of the five but you moments occur.

Paul is calling on Timothy to be utterly different from others who are charlatans and money worshippers and godless people of many kinds. In fact if any of you were to write a commentary on these two letters to Timothy you might give your commentary the title but as for you because that would capture Paul's message so clearly.

Now let's turn back to chapter 2 verse 1 You then my child unlike the deserters of chapter 1 verse 15 you my child be strengthened.

[14:26] Now Timothy does share something with those deserters of chapter 1 verse 15 and that is weakness. In their weakness they fled possibly they deserted Paul at the very moment when he was arrested when the Roman police arrived and Timothy could easily be like them after all the apostles themselves took to their heels and fled at the moment when Jesus was arrested in the garden of Gethsemane.

Paul's experience sometimes seems to mirror the experience of Jesus. So to the Timothy who needs strength in order to carry on and fulfill his ministry Paul writes there is strength available from a fathomless reservoir and that is the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

Now in scripture the word grace very often means undeserved love or undeserved mercy but it sometimes carries the force of strength strength undeserved but freely given and that's probably the way Paul is using the word here.

So what Paul is not saying to Timothy is my son grit your teeth have a cold bath every morning pull yourself up by your bootstraps summon your last ounce of energy and face the foe.

He's not calling on Timothy to find strength in his own resources of grit and determination. What Paul is doing is he's pointing Timothy to a resource outside himself to the strength the grace that is available to him in Christ.

[16:04] Don't look within Timothy for strength you'll only find weakness inside yourself look to Christ and he will give you the strength to do your work of Christian service.

Now there's a great lesson for all of us here as we seek to serve the Lord Jesus the strength that we need in order to serve him is not found within ourselves because in ourselves we are weak.

I would say we're weak in three ways three main ways. We're physically weak. Think of it a little germ can knock us over fill us with infection finish us off.

A sleepless night can knock us out for the whole of the rest of the day. A dose of hay fever can make us miserable. We're also intellectually weak.

We may have more brain than Winnie the Pooh but we struggle to understand things and especially we struggle to understand the Bible. And we are morally weak.

[17:07] There's a corruption inside us. Paul calls it the flesh and we can be ambushed by temptation and sin at just a moment's notice. So physically, intellectually and morally we're not up to much.

And that's why we need the message of verse one. There is grace available to us. So let's ask for it every day and the Lord will supply it.

Usually we won't feel, after we've asked for grace, we won't feel like Popeye felt once he'd eaten his can of spinach. We won't suddenly feel spiritually muscular.

But as we go and get on with our Christian service, feeling weak, we find that we're given all the strength we need in order to do the thing in front of us, the thing that needs to be done.

So there's the first thing, a glorious resource to draw on. So let's draw on it every day. Now secondly, Paul gives Timothy a strategic task to undertake.

[18:10] And here it is in verse two. And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

Now I think there's a clear link between verse one and verse two. You're weak, Timothy, but when you draw strength from the grace that is in Christ, you will then be able to take what you've heard from me and entrust it to other people.

So this is to be one of Timothy's main tasks. Not his only task, because Paul is going to outline others as the letter develops. But this is one of his big responsibilities, to entrust, now just notice that verb, to entrust the very teaching that the Lord had entrusted to Paul and to Timothy.

Timothy must now take it and entrust it to others who will be able to teach yet others further down the line. Now this one verse, it's a terrific verse, it gives us a view of what has been happening over the last nineteen and a half centuries.

The Lord Jesus entrusted the gospel to Paul and to the other apostles. Paul then taught it and entrusted it to Timothy. Timothy now is to entrust it to others, and those others are then to teach yet others.

[19:31] And so this precious treasure, this sacred trust of the gospel, has been handed down from one generation of Christians to another. another. And it's our responsibility in our generation to hand it on intact, uncorrupted, and undiluted to the next generation.

It's a weighty responsibility, but it's a great responsibility. Now let's notice two very important words there in verse two. Faithful and able.

Those two words describe the kind of men whom Timothy is to seek out. first they must be faithful, faithful men. Yes, in the general sense of being faithful to their friends, faithful to their marriage vows, faithful to their other commitments.

But above all, what Paul means is they must be prepared to be faithful to the message itself, the true message of the Bible. This will mean that while it's good for them to teach this message with a certain passion and flair, they must never be innovators.

they must not create additions to the message. They must not distort it or try to make it more attractive. They're not at liberty to tone any part of it down.

[20 : 47] They must teach the hard and challenging parts of the message as well as the comforting and joy-bringing aspects of it. They must be faithful to the Bible because that's the only way to be faithful to the Lord.

Now this is true for all who teach the Bible, not only for the public preacher, but for all those who teach the Bible in small groups and study classes, young people's groups, one-to-one and so on. So Timothy must seek out faithful teachers and he must not choose those who are unwilling to be faithful to the Bible's teaching. But now in the final phrase of verse 2, they must also be able to teach others also.

So it isn't enough for them simply to be faithful. There has to be an ability to teach others. And we all know Christian people who are splendidly faithful, full of integrity and love for the Bible, and yet are not gifted with the ability to teach.

So Paul is calling on Timothy to seek out, to identify and train people who are both faithful and able to teach. Timothy's task is to entrust this precious gospel to people like that.

[21 : 59] and this is still one of the great responsibilities of the churches today. Some Bible teachers and preachers need to be set free from having to earn a living in some other way so that they can give themselves full time to study and teaching, supported and chosen by their churches.

There are others who are able to be preachers and teachers part time while earning their living in the secular workplace. You'll remember that Paul himself, although he was supported financially by some of the churches, also at times earned his own living as a tent maker.

But if you are a person who is A, willing and determined to be faithful to the Bible, and B, conscious that you have an ability to teach, even if it's still perhaps more of a potential ability than a developed one, you might be still quite young.

Don't be surprised if someday somebody taps you on the shoulder and ask you if you might be familiar with 2 Timothy, chapter 2, verse 2. So, Timothy has a heavenly resource to draw on, a strategic task to undertake, and now thirdly, a courageous attitude to develop.

And this takes us to verses 3 to 13. Now, verse 3 contains the basic instruction, share in suffering as a good soldier of the good soldier of Christ Jesus.

[23 : 29] The Lord's church is part hospital and part barracks. So, as far as the hospital goes, he puts broken lives back together, as the old hymn puts it, ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven.

That's a lifetime's process. But even in the process of him healing our wounds and restoring our humanity, he sends us out to do battle. Our enemy is the wicked trinity, the world, the flesh, and the devil.

And Christ's soldiers do battle with the godlessness of the secular world, with the corruption of the flesh, which is our human sinful nature, and with the devil's lies, because lying is the devil's stock in trade.

And the sufferings of Christ's soldiers come because the world and the devil will often attack us because we stand for Christ and his truth. And that truth so often is unpopular.

Now, Paul, you'll see, does not end this instruction with verse three. He adds verses four to thirteen as a careful unpacking and explanation of verse three, so as to help Timothy to see how he can live as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

[24 : 44] And as I said earlier, Paul now uses five illustrations, which not only clarify Timothy's understanding of verse three, but they will enable him to take the necessary courage and enter the fray of battle.

So let's look at these illustrations now. First, verse four. This is really an extension of verse three. In verse four, Paul develops the picture of the soldier.

No soldier, he says, gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. The soldier's aim is to please his commanding officer.

And what his commanding officer requires is single mindedness. And that's why the good soldier doesn't allow himself to get entangled in civilian pursuits.

His job is to be at the ready and prepared to do battle at a moment's notice. Now this idea of getting entangled in civilian pursuits, what might that mean for people like us?

[25 : 44] It means, I think, getting absorbed in activities and commitments that may be perfectly innocent in themselves, and yet we can get so drawn into them that we become ineffective and

useless as servants of Christ.

For example, breeding budgerigars is a healthy recreation. So is caravanning at the weekends. So is Monroe bagging.

That's good for us to enjoy healthy recreations of this kind. I've just picked out three. You could name 33, couldn't you? But things like this, although good in themselves, can become so absorbing and time consuming that the real purpose of our lives, which is to be active soldiers of Christ, gets lost.

The soldier's aim, says verse 4, is to please our commander. To please the Lord Jesus. That's one of the great incentives of the Christian life. The soldier is to be single-minded.

Then second, we have the athlete. Here's verse 5. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. Now you think of the Olympian athletes who are in such hard training at the moment and hoping to win a gold medal in London in a few weeks' time.

[27 : 01] When their actual events happen on track and field, they've got to compete, look at verse 5, according to the rules. So the runner, who's got to run a number of times around a track, has got to run right around the track, hasn't he?

He can't cut across a corner or else he'll be disqualified. The shot putter has got to launch his ballistic missile from inside a defined area.

He can't overstep his mark without being disqualified. And the servants of Christ not only need to learn to love and obey God's moral teaching expressed in the Ten Commandments, we need to serve Christ with integrity and love and doesn't this figure of the athlete also suggest vigorous commitment?

Vigorous commitment, the straining of every sinew as they run. The athlete is familiar with what you might politely call perspiration. And yet, that straining of every sinew has got to be done according to the rules.

And don't you love these vigorous pictures of the Christian life and Christian soldiery? In fact, Paul himself returns to them in chapter 4, verse 7, where he says, I have fought the good fight. That's the soldier.

[28 : 18] I have finished the race. That's the athlete. Then let's look at verse 6, which is Paul's third example. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops.

Now again, Paul is commending here vigorous commitment. It's not the farmer who spends half the day sitting at the kitchen table studying form and trying to guess who's going to win the 3.15 at air, who's going to reap a good harvest, is it?

It's the farmer who's at his work from dawn to dusk, who deserves to enjoy the first share of the crops, the first mouthful of the new potatoes. So what are the key thoughts in these three verses, 4, 5, and 6?

The soldier is to be single-minded. The athlete is to be law-abiding. And the farmer is to be hard-working. And these are all pictures of full-blooded engagement in Christian service.

And when we begin to see serving Christ in these terms, we see what a comprehensively demanding thing it is to be a Christian. And yet, it's delightful and full of blessing for us because the soldier's single-mindedness is rewarded by his commanding officer's pleasure.

[29 : 39] Well done, Lance Corporal. Well done. And the athlete's commitment is rewarded by the crown of victory, or the gold medal. And the farmer's labor and toil is rewarded by a fine crop.

The Lord Jesus requires a great deal of his servants, but there is a great joy in serving him and great blessings. Now, as soon as Paul has finished his three pictures of the servant of Christ, he adds the wonderful verse 7.

Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. Timothy, take away these three pictures in your mind and think them over. Now, let's notice that Paul expects Timothy to think.

Of course, the Lord expects every Christian to think. How are we to love him? Think of Deuteronomy. We're to love him with all our heart, our soul, our strength, and our mind. So whatever we have between our left ear and our right ear, we are to press it into his service.

And thinking is very hard work. But just look at the encouragement given to us here in verse 7. You do the thinking, Timothy, and the Lord will give you the understanding.

[30 : 55] That's what he's saying. So isn't that a great verse about how to grow as a Christian? The Lord loves to develop our understanding, but he won't do it in a way that bypasses our thinking.

So this verse 7 is going to drive us to the book room. There are plenty of books there to help us to think. This verse is going to drive us to the Bible study group. We're all naturally lazy, and we would love to get to know the Lord better and the Bible better without putting our minds into anything above first gear.

But thinking, especially thinking about the Bible, is going to help us to grow as servants of Christ who are prepared to share in suffering for the gospel. So we must do the thinking, and the Lord will give us the understanding.

That's one of the ways in which God and man work together. We're now on to verse 8, where we have the fourth example that Paul puts before Timothy.

Let me just take a draft of this sweet water. Don't you wish you could have a little draft of water at the moment? I'm sorry. I am speaking, though, aren't I? All right.

[32 : 04] Verse 8. Example number 4. Now, the three previous examples in verses 4, 5, and 6, they seem rather trivial, don't they, compared with this one that we have in verse 8.

The soldier and the athlete and the farmer, they're ordinary figures of everyday life. And suddenly, Paul says, remember Jesus Christ. Now, why does he say that here?

Well, surely Paul is driving down exactly the same road that he's been driving down since verse 3. He's teaching Timothy to be an enduring Christian. And he's showing him both the strenuous demands of discipleship and the great blessings of discipleship.

So isn't he saying in verse 8, Timothy, remember the supreme example of the one who suffered more than all others, the one who died for us and bore the wrath of God against our sin.

But just notice what Paul emphasizes in verse 8. He doesn't even mention Jesus' sufferings and agony, which you might expect him to. He cries out, remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead.

[33 : 13] Timothy hardly needs reminding of the cross. But Paul reminds Timothy of the resurrection of Jesus to make the point that the pattern that Christians follow is suffering and hardship first, and then, Timothy, resurrection.

In other words, my son Timothy, you will be much braver to fight for Christ when you remember that suffering in this life is followed by glory in the world to come. And it's the sure hope of resurrection to eternal life that sustains the servants of Christ through times of trial and suffering.

Anyone here tonight who is suffering because of your persevering allegiance to Jesus Christ, you can be encouraged. Remember Jesus, risen from the dead, because that is your future as well.

Now then look at verses 9 and 10, which is where Paul takes himself as a fifth and final example of suffering and endurance. But again, you'll see even here, the dark clouds of Paul's suffering are shot through with great shafts of light.

So Paul in verse 9 is bound with chains as a criminal. And in verse 10, he's having to endure everything. Those are very dark clouds.

[34 : 32] But look at the light. He is bound. He is imprisoned. But the word of God, he says, is not bound. It's taking wings across the world. The gospel is going forward. And yes, he is having to endure.

But it's for the sake of the elect, God's chosen ones, so that they will come to Christ and be saved. Fruitful evangelism. It's often very costly to the evangelists.

Now my memory may be playing tricks with me, but I think that when Isaac Shaw, the director of the Delhi Bible Institute, was here with us a few weeks ago, didn't he mention that nine attempts had been made on his life?

I think. Nine times? He mentioned it very lightly. And yet that work that he's engaged in, in northern India, is going forward at a most rapid rate.

Christ's soldiers in northern India are having to suffer. And yet their suffering is the means of many coming to faith and salvation. The two things so often go together. So after his five examples, Paul now clinches this part of his message to Timothy with what he calls, in verse 11, a trustworthy saying.

[35 : 46] And this little poem, or maybe a verse of a hymn, sums up the whole thrust of verses 3 to 10. Just look with me at this little poem. It's the structure of the poem that gives us the key to understanding it.

And it's a very simple structure in two halves. You'll see it has four lines, and each line begins with the word if. The first two lines speak of the true soldiers of Christ, the ones who are willing to suffer and toil for Christ.

The last two lines are in sharp contrast to the first two, and they speak of people who turn away from Christ and refuse to stick with him. The first two lines are about endurance and difficulty in this life, followed by glory in the world to come.

So let me read them. If we have died with him, we will also live with him. If we endure, we will also reign with him. Die now, live later.

Endure now, reign later. Yes, reign with Christ. Share the kingdom with him. But lines 3 and 4 are quite the opposite, and they sound a very sharp warning.

[37 : 00] If we deny him, he also will deny us. If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself.

In other words, deny him now, in this life, and be denied by him at the day of judgment. That's the message. Be faithless to him now, and he will remain faithful to his character as he has revealed it consistently throughout the Bible.

And that is, that he must, at the end, reject those who reject him. So don't let's misunderstand verse 13. If we are faithless, he remains faithful.

That phrase, he remains faithful, does not mean that he will accept those who have turned away from him. How could it possibly mean that? That would be to deny what the whole Bible teaches about God's character.

And the Bible shows that he always receives receives those who turn to him and stay with him, and that he always rejects those who turn away from following him and become faithless. Well, friends, this challenge that the apostle gives to Timothy, it's a great challenge to our hearts, isn't it?

[38 : 12] I do hope it is a real challenge to our hearts. The message is, be prepared to suffer for Jesus. For Jesus, be prepared to suffer.

There's nobody else worth suffering for, but he certainly is worth suffering for. Let me put it like this. Don't stay in the shallow end of the Christian life with the toddlers and the rubber ducks.

Launch out into the deep and see if the water doesn't hold you up if you haven't yet launched out. Let's learn together to be good soldiers of Christ. Let's strap our armor on and do battle with the world, the flesh, and the devil.

We are weak, but he will strengthen us, as verse 1 promises. But just look at the encouragements throughout this passage. We have the pleasure of the commanding officer in verse 4.

We have the crown given at the games in verse 5. We have the first share of the crops in verse 6. We have the growing understanding given by the Lord in verse 7.

[39 : 12] We have the resurrection of Jesus in verse 8. The freedom of the word of God in verse 9. The salvation of the elect in verse 10. And finally, eternal glory, where we will share his life, verse 11, and his reign, verse 12.

These are the blessings that come to the soldiers of the king. Wouldn't it be madness for us to live in any other way than this? If we have died with him, we will also live with him.

If we endure, we will also reign with him. If we deny him, he also will deny us. If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself.

Let us pray for a moment together. Our dear Lord Jesus, we know that there have been countless thousands, millions, who have suffered as soldiers, good soldiers of yours, over the last 20 centuries.

We know that there are many who are suffering today. Some are blooded, but unbowed. Others are put to death because of the gospel.

[40 : 40] But we thank you for encouraging Timothy through these words of the apostle Paul to stand fast and firm. We thank you that we read elsewhere that he was prepared to suffer, indeed went to prison for the sake of the gospel.

And therefore we pray that in our generation, dear Lord, you will raise up many, many who are prepared to suffer as good soldiers of Christ. Help each one of us to determine and decide to be followers of this kind, who are prepared to stand firm publicly, to acknowledge who you are, and wherever necessary to take the consequences, knowing that if we endure with him, we shall reign with him in glory.

and we ask it for your dear name's sake. Amen.